659 [805] **113. Accuracy of the Age-return.**—Of all the questions asked for the purpose of filling in the Census Schedules, that pertaining to age is generally attended with dubious results. The ordinary villager who has received practically no education is not only ignorant of his actual age but on account of traditional reticence he would not give away his correct age to any outsider even if he knew it. There is a tendency to declare a higher age than he has actually reached. The timely issue of printed circulars and verbal instructions to the Census agency enjoining upon them the necessity of exercising a strict and careful check on the entries of age column went a long way in securing a reliable return of age but still the mistakes which are inherent to this enquiry may have played their part though to a smaller extent. It is accordingly not possible to assert that the returns of age have reached the ideal accuracy which must needs elude the grasp of many a Census till the percentage of literacy of the rural population is considerably increased and the wholesome effects of widespread education and enlightenment have broken the weakening cords of superstition and traditional reticence of the masses who at present do not fully realise the value of the Census statistics. The principal causes responsible for inaccuracy of the age-return have already received sufficient comment in the previous Census Reports but to enable the reader to correctly appraise the figures it is essential to review them briefly here also.

802 1. An average person shows a special preference for stating his age in numbers which end in zero or which are multiples of 5 and it is rare that he states the intervening numbers unless he is challenged or persistently interrogated. There is a further preference for even over odd numbers.

2. No accute distinction is made in their minds by people in giving the ages of children; and children from two months upto two years or over may be inadvertently clubbed together in the category of 0-1 age-period.

581 3. Amongst the Hindu parents there is a strong proclivity to understate the age of unmarried girls for fear of social obloquy, while on the other hand there is some overstatement in the ages of young boys who are pushed into premature manhood.

4. In middle-life the understatement is greater in case of males than the females since amidst the former there is a large number of bachelors or widowers who can best promote their object of securing wives by appearing of a younger age while the latter who are generally married do not stand to gain much by the lie.

562 5. The tendency so marked amongst the Western women to understate their age, does not find much favour among the Indian women who on account of social restrictions such as *Purdah* system etc., have little chance to move out in society and consequently feel little temptation towards understatement.

888 6. The tendency to materially exaggerate their age amongst the old people is very common in India and any old man after he has crossed eighty is apt to declare himself a centenarian, and it is not unoften that to inspire belief in others he relates old incidents which he proudly states as having occured and been seen by him when he was a boy.

805 562 7. Another element of error is introduced by the fact that the enumerator has to make enquiries from the head of the family who has to answer questions not only for himself but also for dependent residents. He might remember with somewhat exactness the ages of his sons but the ages of women who observe *purdah* can only be roughly declared by him and it should be no surprise if sometimes the error of 5 years or even a decade creeps in.

659 The inaccuracies due to the above factors were partly guarded against by previous training of the enumerators and the vigilance of the checking staff, and partly by adjustment effected in the statistics by subjecting the crude figures